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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DAKAR 000664

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SUBJECT: SENEGAL: MARCH 15 AVIAN FLU UPDATE

REF: A. DAKAR 0460

1B. DAKAR 0459

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Between March 7 and 10, USAID/Senegal Health Officers visited the primary sites where migratory birds are found. They found Ministry of Livestock officials well informed about avian influenza, but health officials were less knowledgeable and less prepared. Although a national coordination mechanism is in place, many questions about how Senegal would address an AI outbreak remain unanswered. USAID is now examining plans to strengthen command and control functions, enhance health workers' knowledge, assess the density of poultry populations, procure protective equipment, and develop compensation and culling plans, should those become necessary. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) In response to the heightened awareness and concern about avian influenza (AI) in Africa, and subsequent to outbreaks in at least four African countries, members of the USAID/Senegal health office traveled on March 7-10 to areas of Senegal where large migratory and indigenous bird populations are found. The sites included Djoudj National Bird Sanctuary and Langue de Barbarie National Park, both in the St. Louis region near the Mauritanian border; the Sine Saloum Delta and Guerero/Sonome Park near Popenguine.

13. (SBU) The USAID health officers met with officials at the regional and district levels from both livestock and health departments. In general, the livestock officials were well informed about AI and largely prepared to respond effectively should an outbreak occur. Surveillance activities were initiated in November 2005 and were supplemented in the week preceding our visit by the collection of 900 samples from 160 bird species for testing. The sample collection and testing was supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). There are two laboratories in Senegal that are equipped and trained to test for avian flu. The local institutions, park supervisors and livestock officials were using materials from their general budget to support the new, intensified surveillance and communication activities. There is an expressed need at these local levels for PPE, containers for samples and particularly for fuel for the boats that

are the main vehicles used in monitoring the bird populations. The regional inspector for livestock in St. Louis was especially proactive and provided us with a copy of a presentation he had delivered to all district and regional personnel on avian flu, based on scientific information drawn from FAO, WHO and other sources, as well as Senegal specific concerns. Information is reportedly being disseminated to villages and local communities, which are also implicated in the surveillance process and used as sources of unpaid volunteers. However, the response is hampered by constraints; the Director of the National Park of Delta du Saloum initiated surveillance and communication activities through the local voluntary environment guardians, but he has no functioning boat to supervise implementation of effective surveillance in the islands in the Delta.

¶4. (SBU) Health officials were notably less informed and prepared. Nurses and health workers in the health posts located in or near the major parks and bird sanctuaries had received no official information or directives from the Ministry of Health (MOH), and cited radio and media as their sole sources of information. The USAID team distributed to all information about AI in French, and will meet with MOH officials in Dakar to stress the urgency of communications with health care workers on the issue of AI.

¶5. (SBU) Park officials noted that the populations of migratory birds who arrive in Senegal from Europe will return within the next few weeks. They also noted, however, that many bird species from Senegal's parks migrate within Africa and some to countries, such as Niger and Cameroon, with confirmed AI cases. The Director of

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Djoudj National Bird Park also indicated that since Senegal's recent importation ban on poultry was instigated, there has been an increase in small-scale smuggling of chicken parts across the river from Mauritania. This contraband activity is uncontrolled by any inspection or commercial service, and has apparently dramatically increased in recent weeks along with the price of chicken. Such unintended consequences may call into question the wisdom and impact of the importation ban.

COMMENT

¶6. (SBU) Many questions about how Senegal would deal with an immediate outbreak remain unanswered. While a national coordinating committee has been established under the chairmanship of the Minister of Livestock, and information from this committee has been successfully disseminated to regional and district levels, it is not clear how in practical terms, Senegal would deal with an outbreak -- who would lead the effort and what the action plan would be. In particular, the most likely trajectory of an outbreak is not known, and there do not appear to be in place policies related to culling and compensation of farmers for affected livestock. While communications about AI have been disseminated to regional and district livestock officials and park managers, it is not clear to what extent local communities have been informed. Drawing on lessons learned from the locust response, USAID will expedite funding to local radio stations and monitor to ensure that these messages are received and understood. Other media may be needed in addition to local meetings with locally elected officials, village chiefs and "sous-prefets." Clearly, communication from health officials needs to be improved. Basic commodities such as PPE, fuel for monitoring trips and support for community volunteers involved in surveillance are also needed.

¶7. (SBU) USAID/Senegal plans to take the following actions, once approved AI funding is confirmed: assist the

MOH to communicate with health workers; add information about AI to our community health worker network to disseminate correct information at the local level; assess the density of chicken populations; procure protective equipment; strengthen command and control functions and develop a compensation policy and subsequent plan for culled birds. In addition, USAID will discuss with the GOS the current policy of restricting poultry imports and assess whether this policy creates incentives for contraband, and if testing and monitoring of imported birds and poultry might be a better policy.

¶8. (SBU) Senegal has been proactive in addressing AI in the region, chairing from February 22-23 a ministerial-level meeting of ECOWAS members in Dakar to harmonize measures being taken against avian flu (Ref B). President Wade has called for the establishment of a sub-regional committee to curb the spread of the virus, and he raised this issue with the Mauritanian Head of State during the latter's visit. END COMMENT.

Jackson